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A COLLECTION OF SUFI RULES OF CONDUCT

In the Name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. His aid we seek.

1. Praise be to God first and last. God bless the Prophet Muḥammad and his people, and grant them peace! Praise be to God Who graced His friends (*awliyā'*) with rules of conduct (*ādāb*) regulating both their outward and their inward behaviour[1], at the time when He bestowed His favours on them abundantly, as He said: '... and He has made His bounties flow to you in exceeding measure, both seen and unseen.'[2] He made their external conduct modelled on the Sunna of His Prophet the Elect,[3] God bless him and grant him peace, and their innermost attitudes adorned by their vigilant attention to Him (*murāqaba*) and their contemplation of Him (*mushāhada*).[4] Their condition[5] is that of the mystical states (*al-aḥwāl*) because upon them come by inspiration (*yaridu*) and in them arise the various manifestations of spiritual growth (*al-ziyādāt*), which God accords to them in preference to others, at every moment (*waqt*) and with each breath (*nafas*). Indeed, God gives His Mercy to whom He wants of His servants (*ʿibādihi*).

2. Now, it occurred to me to collect something of the *ādāb* of those mystics[6] and friends of God (*awliyā' Allāh*) well-advanced in the spiritual path who are called Sufis (*al-ṣūfiyya*): they are those who disciplined themselves by following the example of the 'People of Purity' (*ahl al-ṣafā'*)[7] and shaped their character (*takhallaqū*) according to their morals (*akhlāq*). In this way, those

who criticise them[8] altogether without really knowing the truth (*min ghayr ḥaqīqat ʿilm*) can learn about them, their way of life and their customs, so that they may think about them as they deserve. I shall set out on this work only after seeking God's help in that and in all my affairs and after relinquishing my power and strength which I entrust to Him. God bless the Prophet Muḥammad and his people and grant them peace!

3. Among these rules of conduct[9] is the instruction that God Most High gave to His Prophet the Elect, peace and blessings upon him, with His words: 'Wert thou severe or harsh-hearted, they would have broken away from around thee: so pass over (their faults), and ask for (God's) forgiveness for them; and consult them in affairs (of moment). Then, when thou hast taken a decision, put thy trust in God. For God loves those who put their trust (in Him).'[10] God Almighty instructed the Prophet to deal outwardly with his community with the best manners and with a courteous disposition; then, in reality, He set him apart from them by making him rely on Him, as He said: 'Then, when thou hast taken a decision, put thy trust in God (*tawakkal ʿalā Allāh*).'

4. And among these rules of conduct is the instruction that God Most High gave to mankind (*al-khalq*) with His words: 'God commands justice, the doing of good (*iḥsān*), and liberality to kith and kin, and He forbids all shameful deeds, and injustice and rebellion: He instructs you, that ye may receive admonition.'[11] This injunction too belongs to the collection of *ādāb* and their virtues. The most splendid ornament in the *adab* is the type of character with which God adorned His Prophet, peace and blessings upon him, by His words: 'And you have an excellent character (*khuluq*).'[12]

5. And among these rules of conduct is the injunction given by God to the Prophet's Companions, with His words: 'O ye who believe! Raise not your voices above the voice of the Prophet, nor speak loudly to him in talk, as ye may speak loudly to one another.'[13] After that, everyone would talk as if by the expression on his face and no one would knock at his door but with his

fingernails. God Most High also said: 'If only they had patience (*ṣabarū*) until thou couldst come out to them, it would be best for them: but God is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.'[14]

6. And among these rules of conduct is the instruction given to the Prophet, peace and blessings upon him, with His words: 'When those[15] come to thee who believe in Our Signs, say: 'Peace be on you'; Your Lord hath inscribed for Himself Mercy'[16] and His Words: 'When thou seest men engaged in vain discourse about Our Signs, turn away from them unless they turn to a different theme.'[17] He also said: 'Therefore treat not the orphan with harshness, nor repulse the petitioner (unheard),'[18] and: 'Send not away those who call on their Lord morning and evening, seeking His Face,'[19] and again: '... and keep thy soul content with those who call on their Lord.'[20] And so forth, many are the examples from the Book of God [and from the Sunna of the Prophet],[21] which would take us too long to mention. Indeed, for the sake of brevity, I have omitted all the chains of authorities [related to the following traditions].

7. It is related by Shaqīq that ᶜAbd Allāh said: The Prophet of God, peace and blessings upon him, said: 'Truly, God provided me with the best rules of conduct and perfected my *adab*.[22] Then, He ordered me to uphold noble traits of character, by His words: "Hold to forgiveness; command what is right; but turn away from the ignorant."'[23]

The following saying is reported by Sharīk ibn ᶜAbd Allāh, who stated: 'Indeed, people go to the man of knowledge (*ᶜālim*),[24] and what they learn from his *adab* is more important to them than what they learn from his speech.'[25]

Dhū'l-Nūn al-Miṣrī said: 'God adorned the religion of Islam with knowledge, elevated it through *adab* and gave it nobility through self-vigilance (*al-taqwā*).'

Abū Jaᶜfar said: '*Adab* is the heritage of good behaviour with God by being sincerely and faithfully devoted to Him (*ḥusn al-muᶜāmala bi'l-ikhlāṣ maᶜ Allāh*).'

Nabājī said: 'For everything there is something which serves it, and what serves religion is *adab*.' Nabājī also said: '*Adab* is the

ornament of noble people. It means to keep company with the elders (*al-akābir*), to accept their words and follow their example in their conduct and morals, to guard and respect their teachings (*iltizām ḥurumātihim*), and finally to behave well with one's fellows and friends.'[26]

Abū ʿUbayd al-Nasawī said: '*Adab* is more excellent and noble for the devotees (*al-ʿubbād*) than keeping oneself thirsty for a long time in the midday heat or staying awake always at night, because *adab* confers proximity (to people and to God), while thirst and vigils confer recompense and credits (arising from pious deeds). The angels rejoice at the sight of a person in whom the *adab* of the novices (*al-murīdūn*) has become manifest and the People of Heaven glory in the vision of him.' [27]

Ṣubayḥī said: 'The way of life of God's friends consists of three things: scrupulousness (*waraʿ*),[28] *adab* and sincere devotion to God (*ʿibāda*).'[29]

Sahl ibn ʿAbd Allāh said: 'No one is free from passion (*hawā*) except the prophets and some of the righteous men—not all of them; truly, he who enjoins *adab* as a duty on himself is free from passion, as the sages said: "The most beautiful thing for the servants (*ʿabīd*)[30] is *adab*."'

Sahl ibn ʿAbd Allāh also said: 'Disregard of *adab* leads to disregard of respect (*ḥurma*),[31] and disregard of respect leads to neglect of reverence (*taʿẓīm*), and neglect of reverence leads to neglect of gratitude (*shukr*). And when gratitude is neglected, loss of faith (*īmān*) is to be feared.[32] That is because the faith of the godservant (*ʿabd*) does not prove true except through *adab*, and a bad conduct (*sū' al-adab*) shows lack of knowing (*maʿrifa*).'

Abū ʿUthmān said: 'I don't see a better condition for the godservant than a sound *adab*: that is because *adab* gives the intellect (*ʿaql*) its life and through *adab* man reaches the most sublime states and the highest ranks in both this world and the next.'[33]

It was said: '*Adab* is to guard your tongue when you speak, and your heart (*qalb*) when you are alone.'[34]

It was also said: '*Adab* is to revere those who are above you, to be compassionate to those who are below you, and to have good relations with those who are your peers.'

It was said: 'The intelligent man (*ᶜāqil*) is the one who sees the consequences (of his actions)[35] and the man of *adab* is the one who takes a warning from his experiences.'[36]

It was said: '*Adab* is to hold back one's tongue and guard it, to humble one's ego-self (*dhillat al-nafs*) and keep one's heart flawless.'

It was said: 'The *adab* of the gnostic (*al-ᶜārif*) is above any other *adab*, because his gnosis (*maᶜrifatahu*)[37] refines his heart.'

Sarī al-Saqaṭī, may God have mercy upon him, said: 'Good *adab* is part of the mind's perfection.'

8. As a rule of conduct, the Sufi must restrain himself from his baser instincts and appetites (*shahawāt*).[38]

Abū Ḥafṣ ibn Ukht Bishr al-Ḥāfī said: 'Bishr al-Ḥāfī was craving a quince, and so my mother said: "Go and get one." Therefore, I went and brought him a quince. After he took it, he began to smell it and then he put it down in front of him. Hence, my mother said: "O Abū Naṣr, eat it!," but he replied: "How much sweeter is its smell!". And he kept smelling it, till he died without having ever tasted the quince.'

9. Among their rules of conduct is awareness of the prospect of death (*taqrīb al-ajal*) and restraint of expectation (*taqṣīr al-amal*).[39]

Sarī al-Saqaṭī said: 'Maᶜrūf al-Karkhī would give the call to prayer and perform the *ṣalāh*, but he would not go before people to lead it.[40] Once he let one of his friends, whose name was Muḥammad Ibn Abī Tawba, go before the others so as to lead the ritual prayer. Muḥammad said: "If I go before you and lead you in this prayer, I won't lead you in another one." Maᶜrūf replied: "And do you really believe that you will live long enough to attend another prayer? We take refuge with God from length of expectation! That, indeed, prevents us from performing the best acts." And he did not pray behind him.'

ʿAlī ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥīm al-Ṣūfī said: 'The one who restrains his expectations and carries out his work thoroughly is not anxious about his fate (and does not occupy himself with thoughts about the future).'

10. As a rule of conduct, the Sufi should see the defects of his *nafs* and always be dissatisfied with it.[41]

Abū Saʿīd al-Ziyādī said: 'The external behaviour of Abū Ḥātim al-ʿAṭṭār[42] was dissolute and licentious, while his innermost attitude was that of a pious and righteous man.[43] Sometimes he would talk with the poor (*fuqarā'*) and tell them: "Ask me anything but don't ask me about my condition, and forgive the place I am in.[44] Consider me as a wick, that I can burn myself and thus shine for you."[45] Whenever he looked at those Sufis who dressed in patched clothes (*muraqqaʿāt*) and worn wraps,[46] he would say: "O my friends! You have hoisted your flags and played your drums. I wish I knew what kind of men you really are in the engagement!"[47]

11. The Sufi must know his own worth.[48]

Junayd said: 'True knowledge is to know your own worth. To the one who knows his own worth, servanthood (*ʿubūdiyya*) becomes easy.'[49]

12. The Sufi must practise self-mortification (*mujāhada*) constantly in all circumstances.

Ibrāhīm Ibn Adham said to a man who was performing the circumambulation of the Kaʿba: 'You must know that you won't reach the stage of the virtuous ones until you overcome six difficulties. First: close the door of ease and open the door of austerity. Second: close the door of pride and open the door of humility. Third: close the door of rest and open the door of struggle (*juhd*). Fourth: close the door of sleep and open the door of wakefulness. Fifth: close the door of wealth and open the door of poverty (*faqr*). Sixth: close the door of expectation and open the door of preparedness for death.'[50]

13. The Sufi must not sit with the poor if he has any means of livelihood (*sabab*).[51]

It has been reported of Junayd that he said: 'Ibrāhīm al-Ṣayyād went to Sarī [al-Saqaṭī] wrapped in a mat; Sarī pointed to one of those with whom he was sitting, and he brought a woolen *jubba*,[52] but Ibrāhīm refused to wear it. So Sarī told him: "Take it! Indeed, I had ten dirhams with me which I gained from a good source, and I paid them in order to buy this *jubba*." Ibrāhīm replied: "Do you sit with the poor when you have ten dirhams?" And he refused to wear it.'

14. The Sufi must be a man of true piety (*waraᶜ*) both in his outward and in his inward behaviour.[53]

God Most High said: 'Eschew all sin, open or secret.'[54] Yaḥyā Ibn Muᶜādh al-Rāzī said: 'There are two kinds of piety: piety in one's external conduct and piety in one's innermost attitude. As for external piety, it consists in acting solely for God,[55] whereas inward piety consists in making nothing enter one's heart except God.'[56]

15. Among the Sufi's rules of conduct are those relating to his adherence to poverty (*faqr*).

Ibrāhīm ibn Fātik said: 'The qualities of the truly poor (*faqīr*) are: tranquillity in times of privation, and sacrifice and altruism (*īthār*) in times of ease.'[57]

16. The Sufi must never be pleased with his *nafs*[58] and always have a low opinion of it in every circumstance.

ᶜAbd Allāh ibn Mubārak said: 'None has a good opinion of his *nafs* but the one who doesn't know its perfidy.'

Dhū'l-Nūn al-Miṣrī said: 'He who knows his *nafs* best, is the one who has the lowest opinion of it.'

17. As a rule of conduct when setting out on journeys (*safar*), the Sufi should put anxiety aside, he should be good company[59] and be helpful to his fellow travellers; finally, he should not act disloyally in his relationship with others.[60]

When asked about the *adab* of the traveller, Ruwaym said: 'That his anxiety does not go beyond each footstep and wherever his heart stops there be his abode.'

Muḥammad ibn Ismāᶜīl al-Farghānī said: 'I, Abū Bakr al-Zaqqāq and Abū Bakr al-Kattānī have been travelling for twenty

years without mixing with any people or being on intimate terms with anyone. Whenever we came to a village where there was a shaykh, we would greet him and stay at his place for an hour. Then we would go back to the mosque: Kattānī would go before us and pray from the beginning of the night till the early morning, reciting the entire Qur'ān. Zaqqāq would remain seated facing the *qibla*, while I would stay up all night meditating till morning. Then we would pray the morning prayer, still pure from the ablution of the beginning of the night.'[61] He said: 'And if a man had happened to be with us and he had slept all night, we would have considered him the best of us.'

Abū ʿUmrān al-Ṭabaristānī was once asked about the feeling of weakness[62] that overcomes the traveller during a journey, and he replied: 'God Most High said: "But when thou hast fears about him, cast him into the open sea,"[63] which means "Don't be concerned about what may befall you during your journey, if you turn your face toward your Lord (*baʿda an takūna mutawajjihan ilā rabbika*)."'

18. The Sufi should take whatever he takes from God Most High and leave whatever he leaves for the sake of God Most High.[64]

Aḥmad ibn Khiḍrawayh said: 'He who takes from God Most High takes with glory and he who leaves for the sake of God leaves with glory, whereas he who takes from another than God takes with humiliation and he who leaves for another than God leaves with humiliation.'

19. The Sufi must observe the proper *adab* with God Most High while in spiritual retreat (*khalwa*).

Abū Yazīd said: 'One night I got up to pray, but I felt ill and so I sat down, I stretched out my legs and I heard a voice (*hātif*) calling out to me (*yahtifu bī*) and saying: "He who sits in the company of kings should sit with proper *adab*."'[65]

Abū Muḥammad al-Jurayrī said: 'One night I was sitting in seclusion (*khalwa*) and I stretched out my legs, when sleep overwhelmed me. Then, I felt as though someone was telling me, "Not in this way does the servant sit with his Master!"'